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THE  
**Beautiful upon the Mountains.**

THE ACCEPTABLENESS AND WORK OF THE  
FAITHFUL GOSPEL MINISTERS.

A SERMON.

BY REV. JAMES WATSON.

PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.

HALIFAX, N. S.

A. & W. MACKINLAY.

1866.

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The following extract will explain the origin of the publication of this sermon. Perhaps, also, it may be useful to add that it was preached on Wednesday, 13th Dec., 1865, at River John, before the Presbytery of Tatamagouche, at a visitation of River John congregation. J. W.

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RIVER JOHN, December 13th, 1865.

The Presbytery of Tatamagouche met and was constituted:

*Inter alia*

The Rev. H. B. McKay moved—That the thanks of the Presbytery be given to the Rev. James Watson for his sermon of this morning; and that he be requested to furnish a copy of the same for publication;—which motion being seconded, passed unanimously. Rev. J. Watson intimates his readiness to comply with the wishes of the Presbytery.

Extracted from the Minutes of Presbytery.

THOMAS SEDGWICK,

*Presbytery Clerk.*



## SERMON.

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ISAIAH lii. 7. "How beautiful on the mountains, are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that publisheth good tidings of good; that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion, Thy God reigneth!"

Commentators in general apply this passage to the deliverance of the Jews from their captivity in Babylon. Cyrus had accomplished the glorious work assigned him; Babylon had been besieged and taken; its king had been slain, and the Jews had been liberated. Messengers had been despatched to all quarters with the joyful tidings; and one to Jerusalem as well as to other cities. The prophet, full of imagination, sees that messenger coming over the mountains, and skipping along the hills of Judea; and then gives vent to his own feelings, and to the enraptured feelings of his countrymen at the spectacle: "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace; that bringeth good tidings of good, that publisheth salvation; that saith unto Zion: Thy God reigneth."

But the application of these words is not to be confined to the liberation of the Jews from their Babylonish captivity. These words are to be viewed as an emblematic description of the publication of

the glorious redemption of the world by the Son of God. The captivity is typical of the bondage of sin and Satan; the deliverance—of the deliverance of mankind from condemnation; and the messenger or herald, of the faithful gospel minister. This typical interpretation is no fancy. We have the clearest and strongest authority for it, given us by Paul in the tenth chapter of his epistle to the Romans; for thus he reasons: "How shall they call on him, in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach except they be sent? As it is written: 'How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace and bring glad tidings of good things!'" Thus, the manner in which the quotation is introduced, the use of the special phrase, "preach the gospel," and the argument it is intended to support—all put it beyond a question that the passage is as applicable to faithful, gospel ministers, as it was to those heralds or messengers, who sped their way over the mountains of Judea.

But we do not dwell on this topic. We take it for granted that the text admits of this interpretation, and we trust, you take it for granted too. We proceed, therefore, without any farther preliminaries to illustrate this view of the text.

It appears to us that there are two leading ideas in the text; the first is the *acceptableness* of the faithful gospel minister; the second is, his *work*. It is to these two ideas, we propose, with the assistance of the Spirit of God, at present to direct your attention.

I. THE ACCEPTABLENESS OF THE FAITHFUL GOSPEL MINISTER. "How beautiful!" The idea of accepta-



bleness is, we are persuaded, contained in these words;—How beautiful! How lovely! How acceptable! And is not this a fact? Is it not a fact corroborated by many incidents and testimonies, that to multitudes the gospel minister is acceptable? True it is, there are some to whom neither he nor his services are agreeable. There are some—but they are awfully mistaken ones—who would dispense with his visits and his prayers and his exhortations altogether, and would much rather that he would pass by on the other side. The wicked and ungodly seldom give him a cordial welcome; the ignorant and uninstructed do not appreciate his labours; and worldly men frequently look at him askance, and treat him as if he and his efforts were of no great importance. The number of such is not small; perhaps it is the majority in some communities denominated Christian; but if these, and such as these, do not cordially hail “him that cometh with good tidings,” there are others who most cheerfully do so. “To *the weary and heavy laden*”—those burdened with their sins and groaning under their iniquities—is he not a most welcome messenger? O who can picture out the state of such souls, when the hurricane of God’s wrath seems to sweep around them;—when “deep calls to deep at the noise of his water-spouts, and all his waves and billows go over them”;—when “the sorrows of death compass them, and the pains of hell get hold of them”;—when they find nothing but “trouble and sorrow”! Say, if to such, he “that publisheth peace”—he “that publisheth salvation”—is not a most welcome herald! Hundreds of those around the throne of the Eternal will one day bless him, and will point to him and say: “I



was lost, but under God, he found me out and saved me; I was perishing, but under God, he delivered me from going down to the pit; I was an outcast and a weary wanderer in the bleak and howling wilderness of that sinful world, but under God he brought me within the sheepfold of the Chief Shepherd of Israel; and he rested me, and he comforted me, and he led me to the Saviour." Many are the gems which will adorn "the crown that fadeth not away," and which will be placed on the head of the faithful gospel minister; but none will shine with greater beauty or a more sparkling lustre than these will.

If to the weary and heavy laden, the faithful gospel minister be a welcome messenger, no less acceptable to the *sick and dying*. Sickness will overtake us all; death will one day arrest our every pursuit in this busy world. It is often a sad and melancholy thing to note the effects of sickness, especially upon the young. What a change from days of health and strength! Where now is that healthy cheek that rivalled the rose? Where that sparkling eye that beamed out light and joy? Where that elastic step that equalled in fleetness the roe? And where that happy, happy ringing laugh that made the welkin echo back again! Ah! sad, weary, melancholy sickness has transformed them all. The cheek is blanched and pale; the eye is dim and watery; the step is slow and feeble; and the joyous laugh is exchanged for sighs and groans. O what a stern revolutionist is sickness! Friends visit the sick, and it is right they should do so. They are all welcome, and their counsels and consolations and prayers are all well received. Thousands

have been comforted by such visits. But tell me, is there, in that sad hour, one whose visit is more welcome, or more kindly appreciated, than that of the man of God? Ah! many, many even among the ungodly, have been heard to say in that gloomy hour, what they would not have cared to say in the sunny day of health: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings!" And should this sickness be unto death; ---should the feeble body become feebler and feebler, and the wasting form waste more and more rapidly, till the exhausted spirit at last takes its flight to eternity;—who more welcome to pray over the remains of the departed dear one, than the faithful gospel minister?—who more acceptable to comfort and console, and cheer the bereaved relatives?—who better qualified to admonish with these words:—"But I would not have you be ignorant, brethren, concerning them that are asleep, that ye sorrow not even as others who have no hope; for if we believe that Jesus Christ died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him."

*To the decidedly pious and godly,* the faithful gospel minister is always welcome. He edifies and builds them up in their most holy faith; he refreshes them with gospel truth; reminds them of gospel duties, warns them against temptation, and teaches them to fight the battles of the Lord. And when darkness—spiritual darkness—comes down brooding on their hearts;—when the dreary wail is heard sent out from all that is within them:—"Oh! that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when his candle shined upon my head, and when by his light I walked through darkness!" Who so

fitted and who so welcome and acceptable as the faithful gospel minister, with the blessing of God, to dispel this darkness—to re-invigorate their faith—to restore their confidence in Jehovah—and once more to make them joyful in the sensible presence of the God of their salvation? But on this topic we do not at present dwell longer.

We cannot, however, leave this part of our discourse without remarking, that if we, ministers of the gospel, mean to be thus acceptable, we must cultivate those graces and dispositions which will tend to make us so. For this purpose, let us think over and do “whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, and whatsoever things are of good report;” and every other virtue, and every other thing worthy of praise. Let us take as our model our great exemplar, Christ Jesus our Lord. What heavenly graces, what moral beauties, shine forth in him! In manner, how gentle! in language, how sweet! in conversation, how affable! in conduct, how condescending, yet circumspect! in common intercourse, how affectionate! in all things, how “holy, harmless, undefiled and separate from sinners!” He was “the Son of Man,” and he thought as a man, and he felt as a man, and he spake as a man, and he acted as a man; he was a true specimen of humanity; but it was a humanity refined, purified, sublimated. Ye sages of Greece and Rome,—Socrates and Plato and Seneca, hide and hide forever your diminished heads before him! Hear what an apostle says:—“For even hereunto were ye called; because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that we

should follow in his steps; who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth; who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously." With such a pattern before us, let us endeavor to copy it as nearly as poor, weak, erring humanity can do, and we shall hear, not one or two, but a multitude of voices saying of us, what the prophet said of the messenger to Jerusalem: "How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings."

We come now to consider,

## II. THE WORK OF THE FAITHFUL GOSPEL MINISTER.

This we reckon to be the more important topic of the two; at least, it is the one to which we solicit your earnest and undivided attention. We shall illustrate it in a few particulars.

1. *Preaching is the grand work of the minister of the gospel.* In the text, it is again and again referred to. He brings good tidings—publishes peace—brings good tidings of good—publishes salvation—and says unto Zion or the church, Thy God—thy King—King Jesus—reigneth. What are all these, but so many different modes of saying, he preaches the gospel? How like are these phrases to the language in which the gospel was announced by the angel to the shepherds: "Behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to you and to all people." The one communication seems to be a transcript, or rather an echo of the other. But to place this beyond all doubt, Paul uses the very phraseology which we use. How does he quote the text; is it not thus: "How beautiful are the feet of them that *preach the gospel!*"

Paul, then, considers the whole passage as referring to the preaching of the gospel, and so do we.

Now, we have said that preaching is *the grand work* of the faithful gospel minister; and on this ground we wish to take a high and a firm stand. We wish to say, it is the most useful and most important work of a minister. We wish to say that every other work, no matter what it may be, must give place to this. We wish to affirm and maintain, this is the strong light in which it is presented to us in Scripture; and this is the doctrine taught us by Christ and his apostles. We know that some hold out that visiting from house to house, and particularly visiting the sick, attending funerals and similar duties, will do more good than studying out sermons. We know that others assert, prayer-meetings are of greater utility than preaching the gospel; and that, come of his sermons what may, the faithful minister must not forget the prayer-meeting. We know that others still, attribute a like efficacy to Sabbath schools, Bible classes, and the general instruction of the young. Most certainly we admit, that all these are important duties and institutions. Most certainly we acknowledge, that they are excellent,—and if you will—necessary, means for drawing out men to hear the gospel preached. In this light, we say, let them have all praise, all honor, and all attention given them. But if any man put these in the room of preaching; if any man affirm that these are more efficacious to the saving of souls than preaching; if any man assert that they are of greater use in the church than preaching; then we hold that man is not teaching “the truth as it is in Jesus.” He is running headlong against the Scriptures; he is pre-

ferring his own wisdom to the wisdom of God ; he is exalting work above that work which God himself has pronounced to be the most important for sanctifying as well as saving souls.

The Scriptures clearly support this view of preaching. The passages which might be made to bear on this subject, are numerous. In particular, four are commonly quoted. These are—1 Cor. i. 21, "For it hath pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe." Ephes. iii. 8, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles, the unsearchable riches of Christ." Titus i. 3, "God hath in due time manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me, according to the commandment of God our Saviour." And 1 Cor. i. 17, "For Christ sent me, not to baptize, but to preach the gospel." These are the four passages commonly quoted to support and prove the pre-eminence of preaching as a gospel ordinance; and with a little illustration, they might be shewn to be quite conclusive and satisfactory. But it is not on particular passages that we rest our belief, it is upon the tenor of the whole New Testament Scriptures. Everywhere preaching is held up as the great and appointed instrument by which men are to be converted and saved. Observe in the history of Christ, how often it is particularly noticed that he preached to the people. Especially is this to be remarked in the case of the Apostle Paul. In his journeyings, he went from city to city and from province to province, and as he went, he preached again and again, and again. One would almost imagine that preaching was the very atmosphere in which he lived and

moved. He went to Antioch and he preached there; he went to Cyprus, and in all probability he preached there; he went to Antioch in Pisidia, and he preached there; he went to Iconium, and he preached there; he went to Lystra, and he preached there; and he went to Derbe, and he preached there; and he went to Corinth, Ephesus, Phillippi, Colosse, Thessalonica, Macedonia, and Rome; in all these places he preached, and in some of them almost never ceased to preach. In these instances, no mention is made of his visiting from house to house, attending prayer-meetings, or speechifying at public secular assemblies. At the same time, we have no idea that Paul neglected these duties, so far as he considered them duties. But mark it well; his preaching is never forgot; it is regularly and duly chronicled; and chronicled in such a way as to occupy the foreground in the historical record. Are we wrong, then, in coming to the conclusion, that, according to the Scriptures, preaching is the grand and most important work of the faithful gospel minister?

If, then, it be a work so important and so pre-eminent, ministers must see to it, that they give it a proportionate and important attention. The Sabbath sermon must be uppermost in their thoughts. Its preparation must not be driven into a corner of the week; to some extent it must cover the whole week. When they read the newspapers or magazines of the day, they must ask,—what can I gather from this for the Sabbath sermon? When they read history, biography, or philosophy, they must repeat the same question—what can I learn here for the Sabbath sermon? When they go into company and engage in conversation, again retiring to their homes,



they must put the same interrogation—what can I pick out of this for the Sabbath sermon? When they visit among their people, and particularly when they visit the sick and dying, they must subject themselves to the same cross examination—from the remarks and conversation of these healthy ones, and from the pains and sighs and groans of these sick and dying ones, what can I extract or draw out for the Sabbath sermon? The sermon, the Sabbath sermon, is the grand work of the faithful gospel minister. He must spare no pains, neglect no effort, overlook no means, to make it the very best he can produce;—the best in style, the best in matter, the best in manner, and the best in efficiency. Souls are to be saved, and God has appointed sermons as the means by which they are to be saved. “For it pleased God, by the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe.”

There is a tendency in the present day, to overlook this importance of the Sabbath sermon. In many cases the platform or something akin, seems to usurp its place. Ministers are called upon to take a part in almost everything of a public nature. If a prayer-meeting be held, he is expected to be there; if a funeral take place, he must be there; if a missionary-meeting be held, he is looked for there; if a soiree be got up in the neighborhood, without doubt his presence is calculated upon there; and if there be a meeting of a young men’s Christian association or a Temperance society, for decency’s sake and as an example to others, he should be there; and on all these occasions, as a matter of course, he is the one to counsel, and direct, and speak, and lecture, and speechify, and pray. All this while, like an under-

current, quickly and almost imperceptibly, his ordinary congregational duties are going on;—his visiting from house to house, visiting the sick, and other ministerial offices. Now, to all this we do not object, provided it can be done without infringing on the time of preparation for the pulpit. We do not object to all this, with such a proviso; on the contrary we say it is very right, and very proper, and very useful. But on the other hand, if it do throw any obstruction in the way of preparation for the pulpit, then we protest, earnestly protest against it. We would say to our brethren in the ministry, “give place to such temptations, no, not for an hour. Stand up like men and vindicate the dignity and necessity and importance of your work. Magnify your office. Remember, O we beseech you, remember, it is God who, through his apostle says: “Preach the gospel; and be instant in season and out of season.”

It is the work of the faithful minister,

2. *To preach* THE GOSPEL. He is not only to *preach*, but he is to preach *the gospel*. The text says so. He is to “publish peace;” “publish salvation;” and to “say unto Zion Thy God reigneth”; that is, maintain the divinity and kingship of Jesus. The version of Paul confirms this view—“them that preach the gospel of peace.” His preaching must be, not philosophy, not pagan morality; it must be evangelical; it must be “Christ crucified.” There can be no doubt, therefore, that this is an essential element in the work of the gospel minister.

But what is evangelical preaching? What is it to preach Christ crucified? Different views have been taken of this subject; but, without entering too

minutely into it, we do not consider it difficult to give a general outline of it. Let a minister preach ruin by the fall, redemption by Christ, regeneration by the Spirit, the resurrection of the body, a general judgment, the immortality of the soul, the glories of heaven, and the eternal punishments of hell ;—let him preach these, according as they are revealed in Scripture, and his preaching cannot fail to be evangelical. But still a man may preach evangelically, and yet inefficiently. There may be a want of heart in it, a want of adaptation, and a want of personal and individual application. Hence it is that Dr. Chalmers says of this very preaching at the present day, that “it is effete;” and who among us does not admit, in too many cases, the truth of the statement of that Prince in Israel, sad and melancholy though it be.

It is easier to point out a deficiency than suggest a remedy. At the same time, no one can be blamed, who, in all sincerity and without censoriousness, attempt such a remedy, though he should fail. Several such have been proposed ; but at present we can only note one. Our preaching, we would say, for want of a better expression, should be more *local* than it commonly is. It should be more adapted to the settlement, the village, the town, the city, the country in which we reside. The Reformers, Puritans and Covenanters excelled in this kind of preaching. Especially did they surpass in holding up the sins of their times and particular localities, in the light of the cross of Christ. It is true, human nature is the same everywhere ; but it is also true that some sins are more enormous in one place than another. Some sins are more common in France

than in Britain; some in London than in Oxford; some in Halifax than in River John, Tatamagouche or New Annan. And the reverse of this holds equally true. Now, would it not add to the piquancy of our sermons to single out these sins, to dwell for a time upon them, to hold them up before the cross of the blessed Jesus, and to show that these sins, and such as these, nailed him to the accursed tree? Would this not be preaching Christ crucified?

Some churches finding that they cannot make the simple preaching of the gospel attractive enough, have resorted to means most objectionable, and in cases not a few, most unscriptural. Hence it is that we hear so much of the mummeries of Puseyism, with its garish robes, its burning candles, its decorated altars, and its endless chantings and processions. Even among us Presbyterians, there is a leaning towards the same sensuous modes of worship. We must now have our organs and large choral bands; and some will even have their litany and read prayers. But what does all this intimate? Does it not distinctly say, that the simple preaching of the cross is not sufficiently attractive for some classes of men, and that other means must be employed to attract them? This is the opinion of the world, and the world is not far wrong; this is the confessed motive of these new-fangled preachers themselves;—a motive which they have acknowledged; and this acknowledgment they have printed and circulated throughout the world. But souls are never to be saved by such fooleries as these. To our brethren, we would say, keep all such things at arms' length from you. "Hold fast the form of sound words." Hold fast the good old doctrines

and practices of the Reformation. Better still, hold fast the grand, the glorious doctrines of the New Testament. Preach these doctrines, and if these do not save souls, none other will. Let your motto be—whether the world smile or frown—"I am determined not to know anything among you, but Christ Jesus and him crucified."

It is the work of the gospel minister,

3. *To prepare his hearers for appreciating the preaching of the gospel.* We have left ourselves time to make but a single remark on this part of our subject.

Unless the husbandman prepare the soil for the reception of the grain, it will not yield an abundant and valuable crop; so, unless the young mind acquire a taste for the gospel, and secure a knowledge of its principles, that mind will care little for the preaching of it. And who, in these days, is to superintend the religious education of the young, but the faithful minister. We have already said, this is a work subordinate to the work of preaching; nevertheless, it is a most necessary and important work. One strong reason why sermons are not appreciated, is, that the people are not sufficiently educated in religion to appreciate them. At the present day much is doing for secular education. Free schools are established in every settlement, and a very suitable uniform system of instruction is introduced. For these, and all such blessings, let us be thankful to Almighty God. They will aid not a little in making our sermons understood and valued. But we must not forget that there is no special time—no special exercises—no special books for religion, in these schools. Above all, we must not, we cannot forget,

that our long-loved and favorite and venerated shorter catechism is excluded from them. It is obvious, therefore, if we would have our sermons duly appreciated, and religion duly cultivated by the young—as we would have them to be—we must tend and watch over them; we must early season their minds with gospel facts and gospel principles; we must accustom them to gospel duties and gospel exercises; we must tutor them as much as may be, in the way of life—the way in which they should walk. Teachers may do much, especially Sabbath-school teachers; parents may do more; parents may do all; but still ministers must superintend. If ministers neglect these all important offices, it may be that a generation will rise up around them, of anything but God-fearing men and God-fearing women. It may be that a race will appear well instructed and well educated, but withal infidel, sceptic, and unbelieving. It may be that the church, if faithless to her charge now, will one day have to weep and mourn and lament, when it will be too late; and will try to cast in a branch into this Marah, to sweeten its bitter waters, but will cast it in, in vain. “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it.”

One word to *hearers*, before we close. This subject should teach hearers *what the duties of a minister are*. One would almost think a cloud of ignorance has settled on the minds of some, if not many men, on this subject, and yet men of intelligence and and piety. They seem to think that many things in ministerial duty are more important than preaching the gospel. But we trust *our* hearers have now, if they had not formerly, a full sense of its value and

pre-eminence. We trust that they have a deep conviction, that, according to the Scriptures, it is the most important duty. We call upon you then, hearers, to go out into the world and act upon your convictions. If any man say to you that preaching is less important than this duty or that other, we call upon you to rise up and vindicate the supremacy of preaching; show him the lofty stand which it occupies in God's arrangement of his ordinances; and with your Bibles in your hands, read to him again and again on this subject, "Thus saith the Lord."

But if preaching be so important, hearers should take care to give to ministers *abundant time and opportunity to prepare for this duty*. Let there be no unnecessary calls, no unnecessary meetings on the days for preparation. Without time the carpenter cannot make a table, or construct a chair; without time a painter cannot draw out a figure, or adorn it with its beautiful tints and colors; and without time, who, for a moment, can imagine that a minister of Christ can throw off a sermon that will prove efficacious in saving souls, or is even worth listening to?

The most important practical lesson to hearers remains yet to be read. If preaching be so precious and important an ordinance, *hearers should make attendance on it* one of their most important duties. If this were the case, seldom would we witness empty pews and half empty churches. O, it is pitiable in many places to see public lectures, soirees, frolics, and meetings of associations, crowded to the door, on the busiest days and nights of the week; but when the holy Sabbath comes round, the house of God is occupied only by a few straggling worshippers!



Forget not, nearers, forget not the apostle's warning: "How shall we escape, if we neglect this great salvation."

We conclude with the well known lines of Cowper—lines which every minister should know and have engraven on his memory as on a tablet of brass.

"The pulpit, therefore, (and I name it, filled  
With solemn awe, that bids me well beware  
With what intent I touch that holy thing)—  
The pulpit (when the satirist has at last  
Strutting and vamping in an empty school,  
Spent all his force, and made no proselyte,)  
I say the pulpit (in the sober use  
Of its legitimate, peculiar powers),  
Must stand acknowledged while the world shall stand  
The most important and effectual guard,  
Support and ornament of Virtue's cause.  
There stands the Messenger of Truth: there stands  
The legate of the skies! His theme divine,  
His office sacred, his credentials clear.  
By him the violated law speaks out  
Its thunders; and by him in strains as sweet  
As angels use, the gospel whispers peace.  
He establishes the strong, restores the weak,  
Reclaims the wanderer, binds the broken heart,  
And armed himself in panoply complete  
Of heavenly temper, furnishes with arms  
Bright as his own, and trains by every rule  
Of holy discipline, to glorious war,  
The sacramental host of God's elect."

